

Interviewee: Penny Nakatsu

Interviewers: Dr. Grace Yoo, Yoko Tamada, Jocelyn (Juice) Canales

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Bio: Born in 1949, Penny Nakatsu grew up in San Francisco's Western Addition redevelopment project, which included Fillmore and Japantown. In 1967, Nakatsu enrolled at San Francisco State College. Nakatsu served on the TWLF Central Committee as a representative of the Asian American Political Alliance and recruited Asian American students to support the strike. Afterwards, she became an attorney.

Abstract:

Part I: 00:00:00 – 00:04:57 Nakatsu discusses her upbringing in her youth, particularly of her time in school; she hones in on her time at Lowell High School for her secondary schooling. 00:04:57 – 00:09:23 She speaks on her choices that motivated her choice of studying at San Francisco State University. She recalls the Freshman Program of Integrated Studies, having written her freshman thesis on the McCarran-Walter Act. 00:09:23 – 00:15:00 She remembers the Japanese American community as it was in the late '60s and their organizing work that led to the Redress Movement. She discusses her meetings with organizers in the TWLF – PACE, BSU, ICSA, etc., as well as her initial participation in various political actions with the TWLF. 00:15:00 – 00:20:31 Nakatsu looks back on her involvement in the now-dissolved Synanon Foundation in relation to comprehending joint action and community organization. She talks about her observation of living in the Western Addition and their material conditions in comparison to other nice San Francisco neighborhoods. 00:20:31 – 00:25:01 Nakatsu discusses the founding of the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) at San Francisco State University and prominent organizing figures such as Jean Quan. From there, she recounts the prominent presence of women in Asian American leadership. 00:25:01-00:35:48 She describes AAPA's initiatives, members, demographics, meetings, and her counter-cultural mission to be an outspoken Asian American female. 00:35:48-00:44:44 She recalls the impact of S. I. Hayakawa's college presidency on the Japanese American community, as well as his opposition to AAPA and to Nakatsu herself. She also describes family expectations, her education at the time in efforts to create an Asian American curriculum, and mentions names of leaders and colleagues who inspired her at the time. 00:44:44-00:54:54 Lastly, Nakatsu reflects on her personal challenges as a public leader, why she went to law school, and discovering her purpose amidst events of progressive leaders' assassinations and community wide galvanization for social justice.

Part II: 54:55 - 1:04:45 Nakatsu discusses what motivated her to become a leader of the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) and how her experiences attending a public school led to her vision of forming a pan-Asian organization. 1:04:45 – 1:15:08 She offers a definition of solidarity and shows how the organization of TWLF Central Committee exemplified solidarity. She discusses the dynamics of Asian American spokespeople within the Central Committee. 1:15:08 – 1:25:15 Nakatsu remembers who went on to pursue law school after San Francisco State University as well as how in the immediate aftermath of the strike, she and other organizers had to immediately put together an ethnic studies curriculum. 1:25:15 – 1:35:38 She then reflects on what she wished could have been achieved in the aftermath of the strike, including the continuation of AAPA as an organization and more contemporaneous writing from organizers during the strike. 1:35:38 – 1:45:05 Nakatsu shares what led to the police violence toward student strikers and how the strike facilitated her work at the employment law center. She successfully litigated two cases: one case advanced employment rights for formerly incarcerated folks and another case ensured incarcerated women's rights to work furloughs. 1:45:05 – 1:58:36 Nakatsu ends with her commentary on how the strike taught her the significance of the long view, lessons from the MLK assassination, and why drugs served as a salve to the stress of organizing.

Part I: July 12, 2022

00:00:00 Penny Nakatsu: [...] AAPA, and so I thought it'd be interesting for you to read even though it's copyrighted. Okay, so I only have one copy of that. What is this?

Juice Canales: That's a little microphone.

Grace Yoo: Yeah. Oh, and I'm also just doing audio here, too.

Juice Canales: It's cute, right?

Penny Nakatsu: Does this - is this a muffler?

Juice Canales: Mhm, exactly.

Penny Nakatsu: Got to make sure we don't let the cat get anywhere near that.

Juice Canales: That's fine.

Grace Yoo: This is so cool. Okay, you talked about the work here. Okay. Oh, yeah. Well, Penny, we love those images of you.

Juice Canales: They're so cool! We were like, "she's so cute!"

Penny Nakatsu: Oh, the one at the press conference? I have so few pictures, you know?

Grace Yoo: Oh, my God. [...] Are we still recording?

Juice Canales: I recorded it already.

Grace Yoo: Oh, you did. Okay, cool. So, you're going to ask them questions and we'll kind of, like, start with that.

Penny Nakatsu: Are we taping now?

Juice Canales: Yeah, we're taping! Alright, Penny, so let's start off by...you can just introduce yourself, and when, and where you were born.

Penny Nakatsu: Okay, um, my name is Penny Nakatsu. I was born in Honolulu, Hawai'i in 1949, and my mother is a war bride who met my father after World War II in Japan, because he was in the United States Army during the war as part of what they call the Military Intelligence Service, which is a new group that they formed over Japanese-speaking and also German-speaking persons to help in the war effort. So, he met her after the war in Japan, because he was a civilian employee. So anyway, he's from Hawai'i and they moved to San Francisco probably about 1950, 1951, and I've been in San Francisco ever since.

Juice Canales: Wow. So, how old were you when you moved to San Francisco?

Penny Nakatsu: Probably about, you know, between one and two years old.

Juice Canales: Mmm, alright. So, growing up here, mostly here in San Francisco, what was it like...yeah, just like growing up in school? What was high school culture like, what did you do for fun? Just tell us kind of about the culture growing up.

Penny Nakatsu: I grew up, I spent most of my time in San Francisco growing up in the Western Addition on Eddy and Divisadero, and my family also lived briefly in Japantown, but they got redeveloped out. I went to...my parents sent me to a Catholic school, parochial school, elementary school, which doesn't exist anymore called Morning Star, located near Japantown, and it was a really small school - so small that the seventh and eighth grades were combined into one classroom. Most, well, almost all of the students were Asian American. A lot of Japanese, but also a lot of Filipinos, because many Filipinos are Catholic, and there are so few Koreans. I don't think there were any in the States at that time, so there was no Koreans. There were also some Chinese. So, I attended that school from kindergarten up until the eighth grade, and then my parents were able to buy a house and move in. From the ninth grade on, I attended public schools. I went to Aptos Junior High School, and then I went to Lowell, and at that time, there were very few Asians because, you know, the explosion in Asian American population did not occur until well after 1965, which was when the United States immigration laws were changed.

Juice Canales: Right.

Penny Nakatsu: At Lowell, I was not particularly political. I was more interested in other things, although I did get exposure to the anti-war movement and began to learn more about that. And I'm sorry, I have to stop. I have really bad allergies, so my voice tends to go out on me.

Juice Canales: No worries. That's pretty cool, because we were just talking to Dan and just seeing like the similarities or differences in the stories of two strikers.

00:04:57 Juice Canales: I'm like, they're very cool in their own ways.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, you know who else would do Morning Star is Juanita Tomada.

Grace Yoo: Yeah, we're going to be interviewing her.

Penny Nakatsu: She was in the class above me. So, you know, I've known Juanita since -

Grace Yoo: Since like, a kid!

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, yeah. You know, we didn't, we didn't hang out in the same circles, because she was in the next class up. Oh, and then her brother, Billy...Bill! I can't call him Billy. Bill was in my sister's class, I think.

Grace Yoo: Wow, how many siblings do you have?

Penny Nakatsu: Well, I only have one sibling.

Grace Yoo: Okay. One sister.

Penny Nakatsu: Younger sister. So, anyway, going back to Lowell, I graduated from Lowell in 1967, and I applied to two schools, because I knew I would get in them, and they were UC Berkeley and San Francisco State. I decided to go to San Francisco State instead of Berkeley, because I wasn't interested in, you know, going to Berkeley and having to commute and being in those large, humongous lecture classes. I'd get a more personal education going to San Francisco State. Well, so there was an educational program, freshman year program that I had heard about that I participated in called the Freshman Program of Integrated Studies - FPIS.

Grace Yoo: Oh, that's so cool! [...] I know, I'm making notes.

Penny Nakatsu: It was really, it was really an exciting program. So there are, I don't know, maybe 40 of us, 30, 40. And we went to school, not in the main campus, but in what used to be the extension building on Powell Street. So each person, each participant in FPIS was, was asked to select a seminar that would form the core of their studies for that year, and the seminar topics included love, freedom...I can't remember the other ones, and I chose freedom.

Grace Yoo: Oh wow. That was cool. This is interesting. I want to go to this Freshman Year of Integrated Studies, because now they're trying to bring it back!

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, well, it was wonderful. They had a similar program at Berkeley, I think it was called the Tesman [sic] Program, but it was different, so I like the idea of having a seminar cohort, and I had begun to become more and more politicized, but the war, and the reason why I chose the freedom seminar was because it was something that I was...freedom was something that I was grappling with both personally and intellectually. Since both of my parents were not in the mainland during the war, they were not relocated, but that was something that I knew had really impacted the Japanese-American community. As my freshman thesis - each of us had to prepare a thesis - I did my thesis on the McCarran-Walter, basically legislation in 1950, then McCarran-Walter, Title II, which authorized the incarceration of political dissidents along the lines of what had happened to the Japanese-Americans, so I wanted to look into that more closely. I also felt that it was important to note the tie in between the incarceration of the Japanese-American mainland population during World War II, and as the genesis for things like the authorization to imprison dissidents, and years later, we're still grappling with that potential.

00:09:23 Grace Yoo: Well, this is amazing, because I feel like, you know, you always think about the Movement for Redress, but you were already, in 1968, or you sort of had this consciousness that what went down was so wrong. I mean, and so you did this paper!

Penny Nakatsu: And at that time also, folks in the Japanese-American community were beginning to organize into what would eventually become the Redress Movement. But although I was personally outraged at what had happened to the Japanese-Americans. I was even more outraged at the possibility that because the incarceration of the Japanese had been legally blessed, so to speak, by the United States Supreme Court in three cases as justified by national security concerns that also was a precedent that could be used to haunt us, and eventually, of course, those cases were overturned as a result of litigation brought by young Asian Americans later in the eighties, in the nineties. Those lawsuits cannot - the Korematsu, Hirabayashi and the Endo cases - can no longer be used as precedent for incarcerating, not only the Japanese-Americans, but in any group on the basis, without, on the basis of unfounded allegations. So anyway, that's what I did for my freshman paper.

Grace Yoo: Wow. That's an amazing...

Penny Nakatsu: And because we were meeting separately, not on the main campus, I wanted to also get to know what was going on the campus, so I would take the street car out when my classes were over, and then come up to the main campus, and then I discovered the Huts! The Huts were a group of temporary structures that were used to house primarily student organizations, including the Experimental College, which was a student-run group, the Black

Students Union, BSU, the groups that would eventually become TWLF, PACE, Pilipino American Collegiate Endeavor, ICSA, the Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action, and there were other student groups that also had space in the Huts. So, I would just walk around the Huts and talk to folks, and that's how I met folks in ICSA, primarily Mason Wong, I met Lorraine, and other ICSA members, and I remember going down to ICSA's basement drop-in center off of Portsmouth Square where they were trying to work with the Wah Ching and other young men, primarily who were getting into the gangs, and trying to turn them away from them, and get them interested in going to college. And I met the PACE folks. PACE was just a handful - a handful! There were just a handful of Filipinos at San Francisco State at that time. I met, um, I think the first person I met was Ron Quidachay.

Grace Yoo: Oh yeah, we keep hearing about Ron.

Penny Nakatsu: I also met Pat Salaver. The names are going to escape me.

Grace Yoo: Oh, well, Illumin. Robert Illumin.

Penny Nakatsu: Oh, yeah, the Illumin brothers, right? Yeah. Juanita came later. She transferred to San Francisco State in 1969.

Grace Yoo: She came later in '69.

Penny Nakatsu: Oh '68, rather.

Grace Yoo: Okay, wait, what year were you there?

Penny Nakatsu: I started in fall of '67. And so from '67, '68, I was at this program. But I was also starting to check out what was going on campus in the spring of 1968, I participated my first political action on campus, and it was a sit-in in the administration building that both SDS and TWLF led to protest the ROTC, to try to get the ROTC off campus, and also to protest the cutbacks in the so-called special admissions program at San Francisco State.

Grace Yoo: Oh, you were a sophomore at the time.

Penny Nakatsu: No, I was a freshman at the time.

Grace Yoo: ...Where do you think - just because you were 18, and I'm just thinking a lot of 18 year olds, and you were so purposeful, like you kind of knew, like at a really young age the importance of organizing and taking action. Where did that come from?

Penny Nakatsu: I'm not really sure. I think...part of it was the example that was set by people that I met, and also the recognition that we needed to organize, and one of the things that bothered me was that there seemed to be so few (politically involved) Asian Americans. The term Asian Americans, of course, was not something that we used. It didn't come into usage until much later, but there weren't that many Japanese,

00:15:00 Penny Nakatsu: Filipino, or Chinese persons that I knew of who were active in the Civil Rights Movement, and there were in fact, a few scattered individuals, but I felt that the struggle for civil rights is a struggle that - not only for civil rights for the African-American community, but also all people of color, so I looked to the Civil Rights Movement as an example of what could be done through joint action organizing. Joint action. Also, when I was in high

school at Lowell, I participated in what were then called The Games. These were encounter groups that were run by a group called the Synanon Foundation. The Synanon Foundation was a self-help group formed by primarily by drug addicts, ex-drug addicts, and alcoholics, and they had several residential facilities. Their primary means of trying to support each other to break free from substance addiction, really, to get Synanon residents - because it was a residential community - to come to grips with the demons that led them to drink or to do drugs was something called the Synanon Game, which is an extremely confrontative encounter group. The encounter group is a term that came into use around that time through the Human Potential Movement, but the Synanon Games could be quite brutal and quite confrontative, and I participated in a Synanon Game that was composed primarily of children of Synanon residents, and that was mentor-led by older Synanon residents. I was the only Asian American in that group. In fact, I was the only non-white young person in that group. Because the group was so confrontative, it was a place where I learned to speak out for myself. Also, the example of Synanon Foundation, which later on and in the matter of five years or so broke up because of internal problems. You'd see that, again, Synanon was an example of how joint action and community organization could make real changes in people's lives. Maybe not in a political way, but in a way that helped folks get away from substance addiction. So anyway, those were some of the examples.

Grace Yoo: So, like earlier encounters. I was also curious in terms of racial consciousness. At what age do you feel like you sort of understood that sort of like, you know, about race, or you just kind of had that consciousness that, you know, do you kind of remember the age? Was it a class or something you encountered, you were like, "okay."

Penny Nakatsu: Pretty early, because I had to take the bus to go to Morning Star (Elementary School), although I lived in the Western Addition. So, one of the bus routes that I had to take was the 22 Fillmore, and the 22 Fillmore went from Eddy to and through an area that had basically been razed by the redevelopment agency. I also lived in close proximity to what were then the high rise, low income housing projects. All of the area that I lived in was somewhat mixed ethnically. It was primarily African-American. I could see the difference between the kind of lives that a lot of folks around me lived, folks that I went to school with, because a lot of kids at Morning Star - even though it was a parochial school - parents really struggled to send their kids to school. The reason why they sent them to Morning Star was concern about the public school system and wanting their kids to have a better education. So, I could see those divisions around me. I used to also walk around a lot. That's what I used to do for exercise as a kid. I'd walk around a lot, and I'd walk into the nice neighborhoods and I'd wonder, well, how come all these white people get to live in such nice places? The area in which I live in is not as nice, and I could see that there was a racial divide that was economic as well. So, it was pretty early on that I developed a consciousness of racial inequity. I could see it, I could feel it, and I could also experience it.

Grace Yoo: Interesting.

00:20:31 Juice Canales: So, you were also involved with the AAPA, is it called?

Penny Nakatsu: Oh, yes. In fact, I was one of the primary organizers of AAPA at San Francisco State.

Grace Yoo: You were the founder, right?

Penny Nakatsu: Well, I don't like to think of myself as the founder. I think actually there are a number of us who founded it, but I just happened to be the most outspoken, so I'm the one that people remember.

Grace Yoo: Can you talk about how you all just...formed? I mean, how did that even, well, y'know.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, in the spring or late spring, maybe summer of '68, another San Francisco State student Masayo Suzuki, whose brother was going to UC Berkeley, found out about, that these meetings were being held in Berkeley at the home of Yuji Ichioka and his wife Emma Gee. They were then grad students, and those were the earliest AAPA meetings. I went with Masayo to Yuji and Emma's, and that's where I met the folks who were trying to form AAPA, and there were Filipinos, or Chinese, or some Japanese, including Richard Aoki, who was one of the few Asian Americans who was a member of the Black Panther Party - very active in the Black Panther Party.

Grace Yoo: So, was Richard at Berkeley?

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah.

Grace Yoo: Okay. So, you were going over the bridge, going to the meetings and stuff?

Penny Nakatsu: Oh, yeah, right. Floyd and Jean Quan - Jean Quan later on became the mayor of Oakland for a while. And Yuji, of course, went on to become a respected early scholar of Asian American Studies. And his wife Emma, was also extremely dynamic. Lillian Fabros was also somebody that I met there, and so there were a few Filipinos. I went to these meetings and was really inspired, and those meetings were the first time I had heard the term Asian American. The term was meant to be a political term, not just an ethnic, multiethnic description. It was meant to really take back some of our own power and also to develop the concept of pan-Asian organizing and political action. That was probably early spring, summer of '68. When school resumed in fall of '68, Masayo and I and a couple of other people decided, well, we need to form a campus AAPA. First thing we needed to do was to find a faculty sponsor in order to be a bona fide student organization. We made a list of all of the faculty with identifiably, potentially Asian names and the very first faculty member and the last one that we talked to was Jim Hirabayashi, who was a professor in the anthropology department. Jim Hirabayashi is the brother of Gordon Hirabayashi, who was one of the people who challenged the curfew.

Grace Yoo: Did you know that at the time?

Penny Nakatsu: Oh, of course, yeah.

Grace Yoo: Okay. So, it was well known. Okay, wow.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, I suspected, I wasn't...didn't know that for sure, but I knew about, because I had already done-

Grace Yoo: The research!

Penny Nakatsu: The research! Yeah...that was why I, I thought we should approach him first.

Grace Yoo: That's so cool.

Penny Nakatsu: I thought that, you know, he might be very open to becoming a sponsor. He listened to us in that very quiet way that he has, and he said, "Okay!" And that was it, so we had our faculty sponsor and then we started meeting on campus and um, because-

Grace Yoo: Do you remember the names of the early members of AAPA?

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, the AAPA was primarily woman-dominated.

Grace Yoo: Which is great!

Penny Nakatsu: And I understand that much of the leadership, Asian American leadership, is women-dominated.

Grace Yoo: It's all women. All women.

Penny Nakatsu: Women-prominent.

Grace Yoo: Yes, women-prominent, exactly!

Penny Nakatsu: And so, Masayo Suzuki, Donna Nomura-Dobbs, Donna Nomura's husband, David Dobbs, was a member of Newsreel, um, a radical film organization. **00:25:01** So she was another person; other folks in the early days. Then gradually, we would talk to anybody who would listen to us and try to get them to become interested in the idea of a Pan-Asian organization that was focused on political action, because really good work was already being done in the community by ICSA and PACE; but I felt that there was a need for something more. So gradually, we developed a group of folks who consider themselves to be AAPA members. The organization membership was pretty loosely structured. We didn't have dues. Anybody who wanted to was welcome to attend.

Grace Yoo: How often did you meet?

Penny Nakatsu: For a while I think we tried to meet weekly or so, but then I think after a while, especially after the strike started, because we opened up for business. AAPA opened up for business the September of '68, the strike and TWLF occurred not much more than two months later. So once the strike began that basically became the focus of our activity.

Grace Yoo: How many members were there?

Penny Nakatsu: Probably the core group. By core group, I mean the folks who came to AAPA the most consistently. They were folks like Frances Oka. Let's see; I had to do some research when in 2019. I had to really dig deep into the memory bank. Oh, Miyo Ota was another AAPA member. [Nakatsu pulls out a piece of paper] This is an excerpt from a program that was put together by the National Japanese American Historical Society. They wanted to honor the strikers, so I wrote something and I thought it'd be nice to put in this picture of Miyo Ota. She was another AAPA member. We can't really see that here, but this is another small picture. This is also in the San Francisco State archives. You can't really see it, but this is Jim Hirabayashi. He's wearing a *hakama*, which is formal Japanese dress, in a white top with a sword, as if he were about to commit ritual suicide, which is called *seppuku* in Japanese. So the sign is a portrait, a picture of him with the legend 'death before dishonor.'

Grace Yoo and Juice Canales: Wow, oh my gosh.

Penny Nakatsu: That was Jim Hirabayashi. And below that is another picture and it's also of Jim Hirabayashi.

Grace Yoo: Is that picture in the archive?

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah.

Grace Yoo: Okay, I'll look for it.

Penny Nakatsu: And what does it say? "We Orientals, they all look alike, but we don't think alike." Something like that.

Grace Yoo: In that list you have Edison Uno in there too, right? Or he was more like a...

Penny Nakatsu: Well, he was a community person.

Grace Yoo: Right, right.

Penny Nakatsu: Okay, so let's see: Frances Oka, Kendrick Lum, Arnold Kawano. Arnold Kiwano was actually technically a community supporter, but I think he liked to come to our meetings and hang out. George Leong.

Grace Yoo: Oh.

Penny Nakatsu: Who lives in New York, he became, I guess, a cameraman.

Grace Yoo: Oh, interesting.

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, I have to really focus on remembering who else. No Filipinos, because if you're Filipino, you gravitate towards PACE.

Grace Yoo: Was there a group photo taken of AAPA?

Penny Nakatsu: I don't think so. I think I would have had it.

Grace Yoo: Okay, yeah. And I have a question: At the time, it's mostly female? Like PACE, we had talked to Dan, and I feel like the men were in charge, but I'm curious with AAPA, what it was like for Asian American women at that moment in time? In terms of organizing because I feel like, there were just more males, too, on campus at the time. I think even the demographics were more male.

00:30:15 Penny Nakatsu: Right, yeah. Well, I consider myself to be actually sort of an immigrant because my father was from Hawaii and my mother was certainly an immigrant. So I was raised with very traditional values, and I think a lot of young women, whether you're Japanese, Chinese, or Filipino, were raised to be subservient and were raised to believe that a woman's place is in the home, to support the family, to support their husbands, to support their men, and to be quiet and demure. And to some extent, that's also true of all women as a whole. I mean, the women's liberation movement was just beginning to come into being. And women as a whole were expected to stand back and be supportive, and that was something that we had in common. I found out later on that almost all of the BSU Central Committee was male, with the

exception of the secretary, who at one point was Ramona Tasco, who later on became a doctor. And I found out later on from Terry Collins that there were women in the leadership, but they were in a secondary leadership structure. You had the Central Committee and then behind them was what they called the Presidium, and it sounded like the Presidium was dominated, was maybe almost completely women. And each woman, each member of the Presidium was paired up with a member of the BSU (Central Committee) to support them. I thought that that's sort of an interesting concept. I personally rebelled against the structures, the cultural structures and the expectations that were imposed upon me. And I'm actually a very shy, quiet person, but I actively rebelled against that, and especially after having participated in the Synanon games, got used to the idea of being more vocal and outspoken. And I tried to maintain that at San Francisco State because I think it was important. Although I understand the importance of supporting our male comrades and colleagues, I also felt that women had a place and it was a personal decision that each woman had to make. I personally felt that it was also important for women to take more of an active role as speaker, not just be supportive.

Grace Yoo: And you're incredibly courageous, right? We see you in that KTVU thing when you're in there with Roger Alvarado.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, I tried to be. I was inspired by the example of the other Third World students.

Juice Caneles: Can you tell us more about your personal involvement, like what you attended? Were you ever in danger, or how did you help organize? Tell us more about what you did in the strike.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, the TWLF is actually a coalition. A coalition formed of its member organizations and each member group, which included AAPA, which had representation on the TWLF Central Committee, two seats on the Central Committee, and I was probably the most consistent AAPA representative, so I attended the Central Committee meetings. I think Masayo attended many of them as well. I did that pretty much through the strike. Once the strike started, it all became about the strike. Also because ICSA and PACE were already working in the Chinese and the Filipino communities and developing ties to supporters in the communities. AAPA focused more on reaching out to the Japanese-American community. So that was another thing that I did during the strike. Shortly after the strike began, there was a kind of community symposium that was held in one of the Japantown churches where I spoke to try to get community folks more informed about the strike. The Japanese American community was rather divided about the strike at that time, because shortly after the strike commenced, the then college president, President Summerskill was fired. And S. I. Hayakawa, who was a Japanese Canadian was brought in as the college president. Why they chose him I can't tell you for sure, [laughter in the room] but I think it was because he was a person of color.

Grace Yoo: For sure, oh yeah.

00:35:48 Penny Nakatsu: I think he was brought in to try to divide and conquer.

Grace Yoo: Yeah, how did that feel when you were when you all realized he became the president and was sort of trying to [...] folks.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, I know that within my own family I would have conversations with my father, and he was really divided. I think a lot of people that you have this community were, on the one hand, proud that this is the first Japanese person of Japanese descent to become a college president. And on the other hand, here you have these young students, Asian students, Japanese American students, who were in opposition to Hayakawa. So that's one thing that sort of distinguished the Japanese American community. So we did talk a little bit about that during the symposium.

Grace Yoo: Did Hayakawa ever try to reach out to AAPA?

Penny Nakatsu: Not really.

Grace Yoo: Okay, yeah. I mean, I'm assuming he didn't have a-

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, I think I think it bothered him that Asian Americans were involved. Like he once wrote this editorial, which I maybe had once but I don't have it anymore, along the lines of saying something like, 'Oh, pity the poor Asian American girl who bemoans the fact that her hair is straight rather than curly.' It was a real putdown, for some reason, seeing Asian women who were-

Grace Yoo: Strong!

Penny Nakatsu: Strong.

Grace Yoo: Yeah.

Penny Nakatsu: It really got his goat. He did talk specifically about how we were just copying Blacks and that we were-

Grace Yoo: Yeah, I think I remember seeing something like that, that he wrote. Interesting wow.

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, yeah. I think he was writing about me.

Juice Caneles: Reall- he was threatened by you. He was scared of you.

Penny Nakatsu: Well he wasn't scared of me, you know, he just didn't like the fact that-

Grace Yoo: Yeah.

Penny Nakatsu: At one point, I suppose he considered himself a liberal. And he tried to say that he was supportive of ethnic studies, but by the time he became president, it became pretty clear that he was there to enforce a law and order regime. One of the first things that he did was ban group gatherings. He also made it possible for the police, San Francisco Police Department to have their own offices near the gym, and so they had their little outpost. So we had our own little community issue with Hayakawa. Once the strike started, a lot of the energy went into either walking the lines, reaching out to the community, and doing the work that was necessary to keep the strike going.

Grace Yoo: How was working a coalition, though? You had just started AAPA in two months and then, boom. How was that? I mean, you're a young person, right? I'm just curious. It's a lot, right? And you're trying to go to school, too.

Penny Nakatsu: No, I wasn't in school at that time. I was in school for maybe less than two months, and then the strike happened, and then the rest of the year I wasn't in school.

Grace Yoo: And was that most of the strikers, they weren't in school?

Penny Nakatsu: Well, yeah, because that's what we were encouraging. No business as usual. We cut classes.

Grace Yoo: Were some people still going to classes though?

Penny Nakatsu: Oh yeah, classes were still going on, or they were trying to go on, as the TWLF and the strike supporters were trying to shut the campus down.

Grace Yoo: What does your family say at the time because you were a sophomore, second year student.

Penny Nakatsu: I think they were a little concerned, but my mother didn't really know what was going on, and my father, although he was concerned, he actually, you know, I had a lot of freedom growing up.

Grace Yoo: I was going to say [laughs]-

Penny Nakatsu: Because, you know, I was hanging out with drug addicts when I was in high school.

Grace Yoo: Sitting in on those group meetings. [laughter] They were like come home by 10 p.m.-

Penny Nakatsu: Maybe he didn't know what I was doing. I don't think I hid anything. He was concerned, but he didn't try to stop me.

00:40:00 Grace Yoo: Yeah. And what kind of work were they doing?

Penny Nakatsu: My mother was a housewife, and my father worked for Japan Airlines.

Grace Yoo: What did they expect that you would do in college, or be, or did they have any expectations?

Penny Nakatsu: I think they just didn't really think much further than it would be a good thing for me to go to college. My father had to leave college after Pearl Harbor because he and his brother volunteered to serve in the Army. And he was never able to go back and complete his education. I think that always bothered him, quite a lot. Yeah, so it was important for him and for me to try to encourage both me and my sister to go to college. But, you know, I don't think he had any specific ambitions (for us).

Grace Yoo: What was your major?

Penny Nakatsu: At San Francisco State? Interdisciplinary social sciences. It was a self-directed major, in essence. It was the closest that I could come to being able to study the things that interested me.

Grace Yoo: That's great.

Penny Nakatsu: Quite frankly, I spent most of my time during the strike and since the strike really doing self-directed study. Some of it was involved with the planning committees. Each of the Asian groups had a different planning committee to put together the ethnic studies curriculum once the strike got settled. So I was doing a lot of that. I was Jim Hirabayashi's administrative assistant for a while.

Grace Yoo: Oh, wow.

Penny Nakatsu: I graduated in 1971, and then I went to law school after that.

Grace Yoo: Where did you go to law school at?

Penny Nakatsu: Berkeley.

Grace Yoo: Who would you say were your mentors then at San Francisco State? Did you feel like you had mentors?

Penny Nakatsu: Well I admired Ron Quidachay greatly. He was one of the most outspoken TWLF leaders, and he had actually gone to San Francisco State after serving in Vista. So I was quite impressed by the fact that he had done that, and he had this background that wasn't just a matter of going straight through school. Mason Wong.

Grace Yoo: Oh yeah.

Penny Nakatsu: George Woo was actually a community supporter. Although I had my differences with George, I also respected him. Also Alice Barkley was a community supporter because of the work that she did with the Wah Ching. She and her husband, Dick Barkley, used to own a coffee shop called Il Piccolo in Chinatown where they used to try to get the kids to hang out. She was and is a very strong woman. When I met the folks at AAPA, I consider as role models Yuji and some of the other AAPA folks. Floyd Yuen. Richard Aoki.

Grace Yoo: Yeah. Wow, these are all such, you know.

Penny Nakatsu: And then there was the example by the other Third World leaders that also impressed me greatly. And within the Japanese American community, there were folks that I admired greatly, like Edison Uno, who became one of the leaders of the redress movement and was one of the first supporters of the strike. He did a lot to help try to generate community support within the Japanese-American community for the strike.

Grace Yoo: So cool. So many cool figures here. Okay. How are we doing? We can do one or two more questions.

Juice Caneles: What was I going to ask? Oh, I was going to say, so you were mentored and involved very young as a freshman/sophomore.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, I didn't really have any formal mentors [laughter]. I want to make it clear was my own person.

Juice Caneles: Right.

Penny Nakatsu: But I looked to the example of many of my cohorts.

Juice Caneles: Awesome. And I'm guessing like that role switch did a little and a lot of people look to you as like a mentor or someone to look up to, during and even after the strike. So what was that like, being the face of leadership for a lot of people?

00:44:44 Penny Nakatsu: Well, it was a big responsibility. During the strike and afterwards, I had developed a very different, public persona from the person that I perceived myself to be. So I did try to encourage other women in particular to be more outspoken. I did try to encourage folks that I came in contact with, other Asian Americans, to develop a pan-Asian perspective and to develop a broader view of the world and the necessity for political action. In the spring of 1968 or 1969, there was a conference held by the Black Panther Party. It was the first national conference on racism and fascism or something like that. It was held at the Oakland Auditorium, and I was the only Asian American speaker on a panel that included Bettina Aptheker, who was the daughter of Herbert Aptheker, a founder of the Communist Party. Basically, with these heavyweights. I'm not sure how I ended up on that panel, but I guess by that point, people knew me enough as an outspoken person that they thought I would be a good person (to be on the panel). And I talked a lot about that title, to the internment of Japanese Americans as the precedent for potential incarceration of political dissidents. So I felt that there were lots of expectations that that I placed on myself. And I think that other people placed on me. And I didn't carry those lightly. I think at some point I felt like the problem with being out there and going against the tide is you don't always have a whole lot of support and other people may be willing and happy to have you be the upfront person, and to stay in a more reserved kind of role. But it's a different thing to also join hands. So I felt in a lot of ways that it was a difficult all for me to live up to. It was one that I felt that I had to do. And one of the reasons that I went to law school was I thought, well, you know, I need to develop some skills. I can't just be out there running my mouth off. You have to have a program. All movements have to have some kind of a program. The program of the TWLF and BSU was to develop ethnic studies to get more third world students, disadvantaged students onto the campus, to break down the Eurocentrism of the curriculum. That was the program. It wasn't just a strike to protest against the war, although it was also, in its way, a movement that sought to bring out the inequities that were evident in the Vietnam War. I felt that after the strike was done, I had participated in the planning committee and I helped to put together curriculum very hurriedly. We had just weeks to put together a curriculum for the first ethnic studies program. The BSU already had their courses, but the other groups, the Latinos, which was the term we used then, and the Asian Americans, there was no Asian American studies, there was no Latino Studies. So we had to hurry up and put that together. I participated in that, but then the realization grew that I need to develop some skills to bring about social change. I could stay here at the campus, but I didn't really see myself as being the kind of person who went into teaching. So I went to law school.

Grace Yoo: How old in school were you when you decided that? A junior? Or senior? Or like after you graduated, you're like, 'Oh, I'll go.'

Penny Nakatsu: Well, you know, one of the people I lived with was Neil Gotanda, who was already a law student at Berkeley. And he actually encouraged me to think about law school.

Grace Yoo: Okay, cool. And Neil was in AAPA as well?

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, I met him at that symposium that I mentioned. He had just gotten through with being in the Peace Corps in Africa; I think he was in Biafra. And he had come back to the States, stopped off in Chicago at the Democratic Convention, and he's from Stockton originally and found out about the community symposium. So I eventually lived in a household with Neil and some other activists. So he encouraged me to think about law school.

Grace Yoo: That's so cool. Yeah, that's interesting. So many different questions are swirling in my head. I just think it was just neat because you were kind of like our Asian American female face of the strike.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, I think there were others.

Grace Yoo: There are. In the archive, the KTVU and just images that we have, we have of you, and so we see you in your haircut and everything in front of that microphone often with like lots of other young men, right? We're like, wow, that's our kind of female spokesperson there.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, along with people like Laureen Chew.

Grace Yoo: Yeah, Laureen Chew. Exactly. And so I always think you must have had a lot of courage at that time. Racial consciousness developed early and this consciousness to speak up, I think developed early in you, right?

Penny Nakatsu: I don't know if you'd call it courage, but I felt it was important. You know, it's important to step out and speak up.

Grace Yoo: Yeah, it's so exciting to hear that there was like Asian American women consciousness of the importance of speaking up and standing up. I'm curious, you know, we always think of college students and purpose. What did you feel like was your purpose? We always talk about that as a meaningful thing for college students to obtain.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, it started out when I was a freshman as trying to find freedom for myself and to explore what is freedom for other people. I mean, I know it sounds terribly abstract, but it wasn't abstract for me.

Grace Yoo: Like a self discovery.

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, right.

Grace Yoo: And knowing that U.S. past, like with Japanese incarceration.

Penny Nakatsu: Also, there was so little said in my family. I realized I knew very little. And finding out about the camps, the incarceration for the Japanese, I mean that that brought up tremendous anger. Then when I saw the connections it really widened my horizon.

Grace Yoo: And did you see a connection? Because I know Martin Luther King was assassinated in April of 1968. I don't know how that impacted Asian Americans, but did that impact you, that assassination and just in your own consciousness as you were developing?

Penny Nakatsu: Well, it was one of a number of events. Because it got to feeling like we were close to igniting the whole country.

Grace Yoo: Right, right.

Penny Nakatsu: I can't speak for other people in the community. I think there was great sadness. Certainly there's great sadness on my part. And then Kennedy was assassinated shortly thereafter.

Grace Yoo: So all these progressive leaders that were advocating for social change, getting assassinated, yeah.

Penny Nakatsu: Right.

Grace Yoo: It's interesting because I always think there's parallels to '68, to what students have been experiencing, 50 years later.

Penny Nakatsu: And then before that, two years before the strike, there were the Watts riots, you know, and then in the early nineties, there was the Rodney King.

Grace Yoo: Right.

Penny Nakatsu: What happened to Rodney King, his mistreatment by the police, and that exploded into L.A.

00:54:13 Grace Yoo: As a young person, did you feel like your world was on fire, in a way? You're like, this is occurring, this is occurring, the war is occurring, there's been these two assassinations, and just like this...

Penny Nakatsu: I was slow to make those connections. That didn't really happen until I got to San Francisco State. So the experiences that I had at San Francisco State, and to a lesser extent, even before that, slowly ignited my consciousness.

Grace Yoo: Yeah. Because I'm seeing that with young people now, the fires, I mean, everything just that's occurred, the pandemic, and an awakening.

Part II: September 20, 2022

54:55 Grace Yoo: Hi Penny! We're (COVID-19) negative, by the way.

Penny Nakatsu: Oh, okay. That's okay.

Grace Yoo: I just realize that the key leaders were mostly men.

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, they were, but I wasn't doing it for myself. I really felt the women needed to be... I don't know, I just had trouble with just being taking a totally subsidiary role. I don't think it was healthy, for one thing.

Grace Yoo: Right. I just think it's amazing, in 1968, you had that consciousness.

Penny Nakatsu: But there are a lot of women who took leadership roles in a quieter way. They may not have been spokespersons. Like Laureen, and there's Bette Matsuoka.

Grace Yoo: Our first question is: what was that like? I mean it was primarily male on the Central Committee, and I think you answered it, you were saying that you felt just as women, we needed to speak up or we needed to be a leader. But that takes a lot of courage, so I'm always curious where you got that courage.

Penny Nakatsu: Anger. Anger motivated me quite a lot, and actually, in some ways it's something that I've had to deal with throughout my life. But, anger about personal experiences, anger about what was going on in the world and a pretty deep anger about the oppression that I personally and other women faced. And I was very deeply conscious of that. Even as a kid, even though I would, in a less conscious kind of way, came up in the form of questions. Well, how come there aren't more women like this? That kind of thing.

Grace Yoo: How did you become a leader within AAPA (Asian American Political Alliance)?

Penny Nakatsu: Well, AAPA was a very democratic group and actually I think the key figures in AAPA were mostly women. AAPA was...we didn't exclude men, but the person who I think is principally responsible in a way for telling me, first of all about the AAPA meetings in Berkeley is another woman, Masayo Suzuki. Very quiet, very small. She looks like the stereotypic, meek, Japanese feminine. She was an art major and her brother was going to Berkeley, and he had started going to the AAPA meeting, so Masayo told me about the AAPA meetings in Berkeley. So I went with her to Berkeley to those early meetings.

Grace Yoo: And how did you meet Masayo?

Penny Nakatsu: Masayo? I really don't know. I just remember somehow I hooked up with her, like it could have possibly been because I used to hang out a lot around the huts, which is where the TWLF offices and the student offices were. And she was going out with a guy who was involved with the tutorial program, and she may have been involved with the tutorial program and that was a program that also had offices in that area. So that could have been the connection.

Grace Yoo: And then in terms of an Asian American consciousness, to join AAPA, you would need to know that you were part of this community.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, there wasn't really anything to join. We found out about these meetings that was a group of individuals who are trying to form an organization, so there was no AAPA at the beginning. A lot of discussion over at the home of Yuji Ichioka and Emma Gee, his wife.

Grace Yoo: Prior to your involvement with AAPA or this organization, did you realize that did you think oh all of us, even though we're all really quite different, we're Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, that we have a commonality.

Penny Nakatsu: Oh yeah.

Grace Yoo: Okay.

Penny Nakatsu: I went to a Catholic parochial school, very small school doesn't exist anymore and most of the students were Asian - Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, primarily Filipino and Japanese. I think that it was kind of even though I didn't like some of the aspects of being educated by the nuns because they could be fairly strict, I think in retrospect, going to school and being educated with other Asian kids sort of gave me a different perspective than I might have

had if I had come up through the public schools. And it also gave me a view of other Asian cultures besides Japanese culture.

1:00:30 Grace Yoo: Did you know at the time as you were forming AAPA that you were actually doing something radical because every Asian group had never really kind of come together, per say, for something. You knew at the time this coalition building was radical?

Penny Nakatsu: It had not happened before to my knowledge, and I had not been all that political until I got to San Francisco State and although I knew about scattered organizations that, for instance, the JACL, Japanese American Citizens League, which is sort of kind of a civil rights organization, I knew of no pan Asian American organizations. So I thought, there's a real need for that, because our destiny is tied together. Because no matter what our particular ethnicity, the color of our skin is going to mark us. That's something that we can't really change and whether we like it or not, our destiny is tied together. And even now you see it in the way that majority culture still continues to treat Asians.

Grace Yoo: Right. Do you think that coalescing worked because many of you grew up together and cause you talked about morning star...

Penny Nakatsu: I think coalescing worked because we had a common, very deeply held belief that Asians needed to become more active and we needed to have a vehicle to encourage more Asian American political activism and developing a pan-Asian consciousness rising beyond cultural nationalism. I'm not saying it's bad to be proud of being whatever your ethnicity is, but if that's all you see, if that's all you connect with, that's a very narrow perspective. It can be a very narrow perspective.

Grace Yoo: Right. So at the time, you knew what you all were doing was radical and they were bringing people together to make some change and you knew that if you came together was just more power also as well.

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, I don't know how, I did have a sense that this is important stuff. This is really important. This has not been done before and this had the potential of becoming something that could really get going.

Grace Yoo: So interesting. We've talked to some people and they said they didn't know at the time that that was occurring was going to be historical. They were just there.

Penny Nakatsu: Oh, I knew it was historical, just based on my own personal research and observations.

Juice Canales: So you said that a lot of what AAPA was this collaborative effort with everyone else. We're wondering if you could just help us to find what solidarity looked like at that time and what were some key factors that made solidarity happen?

Penny Nakatsu: Well, the practice of solidarity is democratic. Supporting allies, supporting your fellow group members in helping to bring us all up together and looking not just for individual welfare or benefits, but really looking towards the larger goal and trying to keep that foremost and also with respect to the other Third World groups, realizing that our destinies are linked

together. So it's not just intra-ethnic, intra-Asian solidarity, but it crosses and goes across the board.

Grace Yoo: When you were part of the Central Committee, I know you had many meetings, and when you were there, what were the things that were occurring that you feel like, ok, this is solidarity, this is what we're doing. What actions did you see happening?

1:04:45 Penny Nakatsu: Well, the very fact that this central committee was composed of representatives from all of the Third World organizations was in and of itself a strong statement. And although the groups varied in size, the BSU was the largest and the most organizationally well developed. Within the Central Committee, the votes were taken pretty much on the basis of the organization. Although we listened to each other, try to encourage full discussion of issues, there was an agreement that we operated by principles of what I guess probably still would be called democratic centralism, which is, once a decision has been made by the group by the Central Committee, even if individual members or representatives may have had a different point of view, we all abided by the group's decision. That was a really important principle.

Grace Yoo: Of course, of course, because there's so many voices and all. I could see. So there's general committee and then would you report back to a larger group?

Penny Nakatsu: Well, we all put it back to our constituencies, right.

Grace Yoo: Okay, Okay.

Penny Nakatsu: Structurally, I don't know. Possibly the BSU. The BSU Central Committee had a lot of people who I think were organizationally well-versed and gifted. Many of them were also involved in the Black Panther Party. And they many of them were older. Many of the BSU Central Committee guys were military veterans, so they had had that life experience as well. And many of them had already been deeply involved in working with the community. As they would say, there's no differentiation between Black students on campus and the Black community.

Grace Yoo: Right. Nesbit had mentioned that there was a vote right about the BSU had on whether they wanted to join with the Third World Liberation Front. I guess some vote and they voted for internationalism, they said that's their ideology. But they were two votes short of just going in on their own or kind of coalescing with everyone else. And so he said, internationalism guided the BSU at the time.

Penny Nakatsu: Nesbit and Terry Collins are among the strongest advocates of taking an international perspective.

Grace Yoo: Because you were a key leader, what was it like to work with Nesbit and all the other social committee leaders?

Penny Nakatsu: Well, I learned a lot from them because I was still relatively unschooled, unsophisticated, politically speaking. I learned a lot just by being around them, watching them, watching how they make decisions.

Grace Yoo: And they were older than us, Nesbit was much older.

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, right. Somewhat older.

Grace Yoo: Roger Alvarado, Nesbit, Mason. Who were also the other Central Committee leaders?

Penny Nakatsu: Carmen Carrillo, who was a grad student at State and she later on became a psychologist. (Jesus) Chewy Contreras was a Chicano guy. He died later on, tragically. That news conference picture that you mentioned, the one with Roger Alvarado and myself, there was a third person there. Now I'm blanking on his name. He was a Latino and he was also pretty active. He died young tragically.

Grace Yoo: Oh, what happened to him?

Penny Nakatsu: Tony Miranda.

Grace Yoo: What happened to Tony?

Penny Nakatsu: I don't know exactly.

Grace Yoo: Okay, what happened to Chewy?

Penny Nakatsu: I don't know.

Grace Yoo: Okay, so I feel like you were one of the younger persons in that Central Committee.

Penny Nakatsu: Possibly, because Mason was older.

Grace Yoo: Right, right. Nesbit was older.

Penny Nakatsu: Al Wong was older because he had also been in the military, I think he was in the air force. Let's see. The person from PACE, who was the most vocal, was Ron Quidachay. He was a little bit older, he had come to State after being a Vista volunteer. And so, it's possibly true.

1:10:00 Grace Yoo: So it's mostly men when we think of the key leaders, they're all men and you're the only female.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, yeah, I guess so. I mean, there were a lot of women involved. They just weren't...

Grace Yoo: At the table.

Penny Nakatsu: Right.

Juice Canales: I kind of had a question more about this Central Committee. Since the BSU and the Black Panther Party you said were somewhat more experienced, did you ever feel like you didn't have a say in what was going on? Or did you ever feel like maybe even disagreement among people or what were you guys all sort of on the same page the whole time?

Penny Nakatsu: There was a lot of disagreement. There was a lot of discussion. And because the BSU had been around longer, the BSU representatives did tend to dominate the meetings. I always think of Roger as being a group representative, but he was actually more of a spokesperson. But I think Roger's presence was really very, very important because Roger and Ron Quidachay and Mason, served as a kind counterweight because they could also hold their

own. And I spoke up when I could, but it was really those folks who were the most vocal and the most active. And Ron Quidachay, I think, was probably the most vocal of the representatives from the Asian organizations. I had a great deal of respect for him and Mason and Al.

Grace Yoo Well, what I found really interesting is that, after the strike, many of you all went on to law school, like you're a class or something.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, I think a lot of us were probably sort of recruited. I never thought about going to law school ever until I got to State. And during the last two years I was living in a household with a few other people and one of my roommates was a law student at Boalt (UC Berkeley Law School). And he was the one who actually encouraged me to think about going to law school: Neil Gotanda.

Grace Yoo: Oh, Neil was your housemate. Wow, that's so cool. And it's interesting because there was other folks that got recruited to go to law school as well.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, I felt very keenly that I needed to have a set of skills other than... that I didn't really have any skills to really move forward with continuing to try to promote social change. So law school and becoming a lawyer possibly seem to be a good option to pursue.

Grace Yoo: Which is amazing and then it seemed like folks from the strike like Terrence came, went to law school. Mason said he was there just for a year and then dropped out. And then Bernard, we need to interview him, but his first name starts with B.

Penny Nakatsu: Oh yeah, right from BSU. Bernard Skinner?

Grace Yoo: Well, do you remember, was there a cohort of strikers that were going to law school at?

Penny Nakatsu: It all happened, it just, it didn't as if we got together and said, well, we need to go to law school. It just kind of happened.

Grace Yoo: How many, do you remember everybody, like oh there was a contingent of SF State folks over in Boalt at the same time?

Penny Nakatsu: Oh, let's see, who was at Boalt (Hall) at the same time? Well, Terry Terauchi, where did Terry go?

Grace Yoo: He went to Boalt.

Penny Nakatsu: He went to Boalt?

Grace Yoo: Was he in your same class?

Penny Nakatsu: Did he go to Boalt or Hastings?

Grace Yoo: I think he went to Boalt. Dan went to Hastings. And there were some others too. It's not Bernard, but he lives in Hercules.

Penny Nakatsu: Bernard Skinner. Isn't that his name?

Grace Yoo: Yeah, well, he's Asian American, Chinese American, starts with a B, it's on my phone. It's somebody's uncle that we're trying to also track down.

Penny Nakatsu: I don't remember. My memory is...

Grace Yoo: Yeah, he went on to go work at social security after he graduated. But he was part of AAPA.

Penny Nakatsu: Oh, so I know what you mean, but I'm...

Grace Yoo: It starts with a B.

Penny Nakatsu: He was he was actually more part of ICSA. I know who you mean.

Grace Yoo: I'll get you his name.

Penny Nakatsu: No, the last time I saw him was actually at that fundraiser that Asian American Studies put together, and he came over.

1:15:08 Grace Yoo: Berwyn!

Penny Nakatsu: Berwyn Lee. Yeah, I can give you his contact information.

Grace Yoo: Oh, that'd be great because we've been trying to reach Berwyn. Sorry, that's mine. It's a text. I know his nephew, Justin Woodard, teaches for us. Oh, so Berwyn Lee is his uncle but he said Brewyn hasn't really talked to anyone about the strike.

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, I thought it was great that he came out for that event, but I hadn't seen him in years. I'd lost track of him after State.

Grace Yoo: Well, we're trying to get him on board here.

Penny Nakatsu: So good.

Grace Yoo: So, yeah, because he I don't know if he was in the same cohort with you at Boalt. Because I felt like Mason went to law school, Berwyn went to law school, Terry...

Penny Nakatsu: Also, Daro Inouye, who was an AAPA person and he went to Hastings and he was with the public defenders' office for a really long time, and then he also, I don't know if he's still in private practice.

Grace Yoo: So those were like the Asian Americans were there.

Penny Nakatsu: Terry Terauchi.

Grace Yoo: Oh, yeah, Terry. Were there others that were from the BSU that went on to law school?

Penny Nakatsu: Jerry Varnado, Benny Stewart, Ramona.

Grace Yoo: Oh, Jerry, that's right, Bernardo. Oh, Benny Stewart, yes. Ramona went on to become a physician.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, yeah, she was thinking about law school, but then she decided to go to.

Grace Yoo: So she actually went to law school for a little bit?

Penny Nakatsu: No, no, no. I don't think so.

Grace Yoo: There's another woman, Latina.

Penny Nakatsu: Carmen Carrillo later on went to law school in Hawaii. I never talked to her about that.

Grace Yoo: There was one another woman who was part of the legal committee. She's come out to things, I need to remember her name, but its on my phone, I think.

Penny Nakatsu: Speaking of the legal committee, have you talked to or thought about talking to the person who was the head of the legal committee for a pretty long period of time. She's actually Jewish, I can't remember.

Grace Yoo: Yeah, I was going to say a white woman, right?

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, she was married to Tony Miranda for a while I can't remember anyway, but no, you haven't talked to her yet. She's still very active. She works a lot with the incarcerated.

Grace Yoo: Well, I might e-mail you for that name because we want to interview some other folks too, and we'd love to interview some from legal committee. Actually, we want to get a list of everyone that got arrested. But I don't know where that list is and how to get it, but maybe she might know.

Penny Nakatsu: Okay.

Grace Yoo: The other thing that we've learned, we didn't know. I didn't know like Nesbit was in jail for nine months or in prison for nine months.

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, I didn't actually know that too much later that he was in there that long also. Benny was also. It's been a long time.

Grace Yoo: How long was Benny?

Penny Nakatsu: I don't know, but it was long.

Grace Yoo: And then we didn't know Paul Yamazaki spent six months.

Penny Nakatsu: Oh, maybe I knew back then, but I didn't realize that. Right now, it feels like it's something I didn't know. Six months?

Grace Yoo: Yeah, that's a long time. And then he was kicked out of State, so he never got his degree.

Penny Nakatsu: Oh, I didn't know that.

Grace Yoo: Yeah, yeah. So, his story is so interesting too, because he said, I guess his own racial consciousness. There was some meeting, I don't know if you were at the meeting and Terry Collins was there and they organized it and he was like, okay, all the people of color stay and everyone else could leave. So Paul decides to leave because he doesn't think he is a person of color and Terrence is like, "You stay."

Penny Nakatsu: That's funny.

Grace Yoo: And that his racial consciousness awakening.

Penny Nakatsu: That's where it started. Yeah, I thought of him as being more identified with the SDS and the PL people. And then he started hanging out with the rest of us colored folks.

Grace Yoo: Yeah, but he's also really interesting too, because there was Francis Oka.

Penny Nakatsu: Francis Oka used to work at city lights and his girlfriend, Jane Tabata, was also involved in the strike. And Francis Oka, he was a pretty he was a gifted poet, but he died tragically very young around that time because he was killed in a motorcycle accident.

1:20:00 Grace Yoo: I'm just curious, you don't have a picture of just everyone of AAPA at one point?

Penny Nakatsu: No, sorry. Yeah, yeah, yeah. But he was saying Francis Oka was really influential for him because I guess after he got arrested and was released, I guess Francis helped Paul (Yamazaki) get a job at City Lights.

Penny Nakatsu: That I knew.

Grace Yoo: So we were like, I think we're going to interview Paul and ask him more about Francis. We'd love to see if there's a picture and hear about even Francis. He said Francis recruited him to be part of AAPA.

Penny Nakatsu: Oh I didn't know that.

Grace Yoo: Yes, Francis is really influential for him.

Penny Nakatsu: I didn't realize that he had spent that much time in jail and that he had gotten actually gotten kicked out of State.

Grace Yoo: He did. He did. But again, he was another person who said that I followed Penny.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, I don't know about that. Very kind for all those people to remember things that way.

Grace Yoo: Yeah, yeah, there's some sweet memories and stuff of that time. You have some questions.

Juice Canales: Well, something that's coming up, so after the strike ended, some people got kicked out, some people continued school, some people graduated. So what was it like being on campus after the strike and did these meetings continue or were there more action plans? What did that look like?

Penny Nakatsu: Well, the strike ended. It was settled. And what is it March of?

Grace Yoo: March 69.

Penny Nakatsu: And the settlement called for we thought we got what we wanted, School of Ethnic Studies, and so we had to gear up all of a sudden really quickly to put together the first classes. Now that the BSU, the Black Studies program was already pretty well developed, but the

other, the other components of what we wanted it to be, a Third World Studies, but I'll say Ethnic Studies because that's what it became. We didn't really have a curriculum at that point. I think maybe Professor Juan Martinez may have taught. But there was no Asian American Studies, so we had to work really quickly and really fast and each of the Asian American ethnic groups worked with the community to put together a curriculum planning groups and that's how we managed to cobble together the opening curriculum. But there was literally, there were no texts. We had to make them up or cobble it together from articles. For the Chinese, there was a book called *Chinese in America*, which was long out of print. And that was the only book that I knew, maybe there were others, and they were using xerox copies of that book because there was no, there was nothing for the Japanese. Similarly, we had to pull together a few things. There are books about the camp experience. But basically we were starting pretty much from scratch.

Grace Yoo: That's amazing. When you were building the curriculum were you also seeing like, oh, wow, this occurred, but we don't have any documentation on this! Or were you thinking, I know the preservation of Angel Island, that didn't happen until the 70s, but I was wondering as you were building the curriculum, you were like whoa?

Penny Nakatsu: I think we were all deeply conscious of the fact that so much of our history had not been recorded, which made it even more difficult. History is made by those who write about it, really, and it gets lost if it isn't preserved in some fashion.

Grace Yoo: As a young person, as you're building the curriculum, was there something about Asian American history that you were like, darn, I should have asked my grandmother about that, or I should have asked my uncle? Was there some point in history, you were like, oh man, I want to know more?

Penny Nakatsu: Well, I always had questions, but within the Japanese community in particular, I think maybe the other Asian American groups as well, there is a tendency for the older generation not to say very much, particularly if they had come from really difficult circumstances and they didn't want to burden the kids with them, so they just didn't talk. My dad had been in the army during World War II, and I'm sure he saw a lot of stuff. He fought in the Pacific and he was part of what they call the Military Intelligence Service. So, he helped interrogate Japanese soldiers and that kind of thing.

Grace Yoo: And as you got older, were you like, oh man, I should have asked him about that?

01:25:15 Penny Nakatsu: Well, yeah. And he just never seemed to want to talk. And by the time I got together to really start pressing, my dad had already passed. My mother is from Japan, I know virtually nothing about it, but I don't think that's unusual. I didn't think to ask. By the time it came up to me as something that, hey, this is something that I know nothing about. It was too late. That's true of a lot of people.

Grace Yoo: It is, it is. I have to say, though, with Ethnic Studies, there is the honoring of the past, so we go make them go interview their parent or their grandparent about some particular event. That's just part of the curriculum.

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, well, I think Ethnic Studies has given rise to organizations that are concentrating on preserving and recording the history. So I think that's I considered that to be,

not that such organizations didn't exist to some extent, but I think they really came into really began to flower and came to more prominence after the school.

Grace Yoo: And I do think that is one of the legacies of Ethnic Studies is to preserve history and to remember it, kind of like what we're doing here, and to share it with different generations. Yoko, you had been doing that too in your courses interviewing folks.

Yoko Tamada: Yeah, I'm taking Asian Americans of Mixed Heritage, because I'm biracial, class. And so one of the assignments is to interview someone who is biracial over the age of 25. I'm excited about who I'm going to interview and what they have to say as an older biracial person, so that's exciting.

Grace Yoo: I think it's just one of the teaching methodologies of Ethnic Studies. Let's go back to our questions.

Juice Canales: Oh wait I have one question. So you said that a lot of the information you had to go get yourself. What are some other ways that you would collect information? You said you found articles and books?

Penny Nakatsu: Working with community people. So even if they hadn't written, most of them weren't scholars, but they had life experience. So we tried to tap into that into that wisdom.

Juice Canales: Did you feel like it was always accessible, or were there times where you're scrambling to find a person with a certain story?

Penny Nakatsu: Major scrambling all the time. Major, major scrambling.

Grace Yoo: Yeah, at the time too, I mean, there's so many pieces in Asian American history. I was curious if the preservation of Angel Island really also emerged from just people, because Angel Island wasn't preserved in the 70s.

Penny Nakatsu: I don't know, I suspect.

Grace Yoo: That just when people realize, wow.

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, I think possibly. I think there are lots of things that were kind of a ripple effect of.

Grace Yoo: Yes, a ripple effect and a consciousness that emerged that we need to do something.

Penny Nakatsu: A lot of the community organizations that are still around, organizations that were formed around that time period, some of them were veterans of the strike or young Asian Americans who have been influenced by the strike and Ethnic Studies. What is it? Is it CDC, which is a Housing Development Corporation, is an example of a Chinatown based affordable housing group, that was formed really by our contemporaries. Kimochi, which is an organization to help the elderly and the Japanese community, it serves not just Japanese, but it was formed historically to serve the older Japanese, that was formed as outgrowth of the strike.

Grace Yoo: By the way, what was Jeff Mori part of AAPA?

Penny Nakatsu: Jeff Mori was a few years younger, so he wasn't at State then. But I remember we went out to George Washington High School and talked to Jeff. He was one of the young student leaders at that time.

Grace Yoo: Do you remember? Did AAPA do community service? Or were you all individually going to tutor and do other things?

Penny Nakatsu: Well, we weren't formed as a community service organization and there are individuals who are sort of were involved in community service, but that wasn't a focus of AAPA.

Juice Canales: So asking some questions about after the strike, do you feel like there was anything that you didn't get to achieve that you wanted to?

1:30:15 Penny Nakatsu: Well, I think it would have been good if AAPA had been able to continue on at San Francisco State, but because AAPA is a student organization, there's so few of us once we left, I really don't think there was a group like AAPA for a long time.

Grace Yoo: I'm wondering when it kind of disappeared, it lasted for a while right?

Penny Nakatsu: Well, once the strike ended, though, there were so few of us that a lot of the efforts went into getting Ethnic Studies together or community work.

Grace Yoo: And there might be a need for resurgence.

Juice Canales: A timeline.

Grace Yoo: Timeline of AAPA.

Penny Nakatsu: So that's one thing. I mean, I think it's great that student activism hasn't died, and it goes through ebbs and flows. But I think that is one problem with student organizations is finding a way to keep them going.

Grace Yoo: Exactly, exactly. Well, there's a resurgence of, I think, Asian American student activism now. It's so huge, but it's also different, like social media, it's online. The online component is huge.

Penny Nakatsu: The other thing is I wish there had been more contemporaneous writing about the strike. The Barlow Shapiro book, *An End to Silence*, I'm glad that was done but I wish there had been more contemporaneous writing that had been done at that time. Even now, there's very little that's been written since.

Grace Yoo: Well, that's why we're doing this digital archive so that people can write about it, reflect upon it, teach about it. I'm really about teaching about it because, SF State students, when you hear about it, there's such pride in this legacy, that you were part of. We don't have a football team but we have a SF State student strike.

Penny Nakatsu: Right. And it's important to remember that Ethnic Studies wasn't given to us. We had to fight for it.

Juice Canales: I do think there's just something beautiful about you guys just like doing what you do with like, let's not write about it, let's not try to pause to videotape anything. There's just something beautiful about this is where we are now, let's run with what we have.

Penny Nakatsu: To some extent, I really feel that when you come from nothing, we're just starting from nothing. That's both kind of daunting, but it's also...

Grace Yoo: It's an opportunity.

Penny Nakatsu: Yes, it's a real opportunity.

Grace Yoo: And I love that how you said Penny, that you knew that you all were doing something kind of revolutionary when you were all working together across different ethnic groups. You knew that this was monumental. I appreciate that you knew at that moment in time what you were doing was radical. I mean, that's amazing.

Penny Nakatsu: I think other people knew it too.

Grace Yoo: But you were like 19.

Yoko Tamada: What's so funny is that Dan said the opposite, he was like, we didn't know what we were doing. We just knew that it felt right. We just knew that it felt right and we didn't know that it was going to be revolutionary or historical. Dan really was like we just, we knew, there was something in our heart that said we have to fight for this.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, that was certainly part of it, that this is the right thing to do, but there was more to it than that, it wasn't just the right thing to do. There are things that needed to be. Things that needed to change and we wanted to help make that change happen.

Grace Yoo: The cool thing about interviewing all the strikers is that whatever they learned about the strike, everyone said there was this time as like an 18-year-old, 19-year-old, when they had to make this choice. And, as a young person, you're always looking for purpose. So that becomes purpose and then that's a catalyst for so many other things that occur in people's lives later about trying to create change wherever they're at.

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, I think it's really amazing that during the strike, because the strike went on for about six months, and most of us didn't go to classes that year. It wasn't a difficult decision to make. It was something that had to be done and we weren't thinking about well, what about my future? What's this going to do to my future if I don't go to class six months or a year?

Grace Yoo: Yeah. You were part of it. You just knew I'm part of this. And so there wasn't...?

Penny Nakatsu: No, I knew this is important. Learning happens in a lot of ways.

Grace Yoo: Yeah. Again, I think that again, you were like 18 or 19 for you to realize that this is so important and stay with that.

Yoko Tamada: Do you ever get tired about talking about the violence that happened in result of fighting for Ethnic Studies or is that not talked about enough? Or do you think there's a middle ground.

1:35:38 Penny Nakatsu: I don't know whether it's talked about too much or not enough. I do know that it was an important part of what happened and the violence occurred because of the strong opposition. People like Hayakawa coming into office and immediately banning all public gatherings. I think that decision in a lot of ways just pissed so many people off. Plus we knew it was important to continue meeting, continue having rallies. San Francisco Police Department didn't have a tactical squad. The tactical squad was formed during that period of time and the police formed had already been thinking about it because of what had happened a couple of years ago - all the auto row demonstrations, so they were already gearing up to form a tactical squad. I think they really cut their teeth at the San Francisco State and the strike, so the violence was part of that. Sometimes it's unfortunate that it takes violence sometimes to make change, to make things happen. That's just the way it was. That's not all. That's not the entire story. I think for some people they focus on the violence and it takes on a bigger part of their consciousness than I think it needs to be. A lot of people were psychologically I think very deeply traumatized by the violence and by the drama of the strike. I think it continued to have an impact for many of them. There are a lot of people for whom when you talk to them, you get the feeling that they feel that participating in the strike was the most important thing they've ever done or certainly an important thing, which is nice, which is good. But I hope they don't feel it was the most important thing they ever did because that says something about that they don't feel as proud of whatever else they did. But symbolic action has its place, but you have to have program. It's not just the talking. It's not just the rallies. It's not just the propaganda. You've got to have a program in order to effect meaningful (change).

Grace Yoo: Well, I think it's amazing that you all after the strike were trying to work on the curriculum and get those classes organized. And I heard you had also co-taught a class.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, as sort of a TA (teaching assistant).

Grace Yoo: With Dan?

Penny Nakatsu: Oh, no, I don't think so. I don't remember. I remember helping Edison Uno out with the Japanese American historical history stuff. Also, I was working a little bit with Dudley Yasuda who did the psychology course. He was already teaching at City College, and unfortunately, he was killed by one of his own students. He was shot. So it's unfortunate.

Grace Yoo: What was his name?

Penny Nakatsu: Dudley Yasuda.

Grace Yoo: Yeah, and he had taught a Japanese American course?

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, I think one of the psych courses. And when I went to law school, I was a TA for the Asian Americans and the Law course at Berkeley.

Grace Yoo: Who taught the class?

Penny Nakatsu: Judge Ken Kawaichi. Dale Minami was also TA. Bunch of us were TAs.

Grace Yoo: I'm so curious to the strike, as you said, there's all these vibrations that followed and other movements that followed. And I was also curious about the redress movement.

1:40:00 Penny Nakatsu: The redress movement was already gearing up. Edison Uno, the JACL, they've been talking about already, but it didn't really go into high gear until the early 70s.

Grace Yoo: Right. It just seems like there's all this timing that seems like the strike influences so many other things.

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, I think there were lots of things simmering, shall we say, that were part of the ferment of which the strike was apart.

Grace Yoo: Which we should probably do like a graph of the SF State strike and all these other things that start to happen, especially in Asian American history. So many other things. I hotel.

Penny Nakatsu: The anti-Marcos movement.

Yoko Tamada: Is there anything you can talk about, because Dan mentioned these group meetings that would happen where they would read Mao and they would read from these other radical texts and talk to each other and how you needed to actually know about them in order to be in these rooms with other strikers. And it was kind of like a secret revolutionary book club. Do you have your memories about that?

Penny Nakatsu: Secret revolutionary book club? I don't know about that. I guess that's so secret I didn't know that.

Yoko Tamada: I feel like that was just a glimpse into how these just weren't college students striking and, like you mentioned, you needed to build programs, you couldn't just strike and be out there.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, a lot of those were very deeply influenced and immersed to varying degrees and studying dialectical materialism, Mao Zedong thought, which is a variant of a traditional marxism and it gives you a common language. I think that's one thing that I think it's why it's important to read as well as act, you need to be able to have a framework within which to look at what you're doing, look at how to get things done, how to organize. So that was something that we all did to varying degrees. In terms of the secret book club, I really don't know about it. So I guess it really was a secret book club.

Grace Yoo: So after you graduated from SF State, did you work for a bit or you went straight to law school?

Penny Nakatsu: I went straight to law school.

Grace Yoo: Ok, and then after you graduated from law school, what did you do?

Penny Nakatsu: I wanted to do public interest work or get a job as a poverty lawyer and there just weren't jobs available. When I was in law school, I interned for Public Advocates, which was the public interest law firm that actually did the OFJ, the officers for justice lawsuit against the San Francisco Police Department and later on the fire department that really opened up the opportunities. So I was really influenced by that, but I couldn't get a job there. There were very few public interest jobs. So for the first year I worked with a plaintiffs antitrust law firm, I thought, oh, that's close. Anti-trust. Busting big business. That's a public interest, isn't it? Well, maybe, yes, maybe no. But the actual practice of anti-trust law is really about getting money. So

I did that and then in the meantime, there were some openings that came up with the Alameda County Legal Aid Society, which I applied for. And so I worked for the legal aid society for about two years. And then I also worked for Employment Law Center, which was a public interest law firm, privately funded, not governmentally funded, and at the Employment Law Center I did a lot of work on trying to advance the employment rights of ex-offenders. There are a couple of lawsuits that I worked on that I think managed to make a dent. One of them was I had a client who was a CETA (Comprehensive Training and Education Act) worker, temporarily. It was a jobs training program and so it funded a lot of temporary jobs for a lot of folks, and my client was a young kid who worked for the city of Alameda and when he applied, there was a questionnaire and it asked if he'd ever been arrested and he said no and it turned out that he had actually been busted for having marijuana, but he thought had been expunged so he wasn't trying to deceive anybody, and it came to light at he had been arrested and unfortunately, the city of Alameda, their actual charter said you can't hire anybody who's ever been arrested. So I followed suit in federal court and got that knocked out.

Grace Yoo: Oh good.

1:45:05 Penny Nakatsu: And the other lawsuit that I'm really proud of is working with a team of other women lawyers. We sued the city and county of San Francisco to try to force them to have a work furlough program for women prisoners because there was one for men. Work furlough is a program where prisoners who are still serving time can leave and work during the day and then come back and continue to serve time. There was opportunity for men, but none for women, so we were able to get the city to develop work furlough for women.

Grace Yoo: That's so cool. These are monumental legal cases.

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, then the law started becoming a lot more conservative, unfortunately. So I did that and then I eventually transitioned into land use and public law, which is where I spent most of my time as a lawyer.

Grace Yoo: And what would you say has been the lasting impact of the strike for you in your career?

Penny Nakatsu: Well, I never would have thought about going to law school for one thing. If you look at my high school yearbook, you know how you have pictures and where you going to go to college and what you want to do, well in my senior year, it said that my ambition was to study at the Sorbonne and become an art curator. So that shows you where my head was at then, it was sort of in the arts. I was interested in the theater. It was not until San Francisco State that I really started to really learn more about politics and it just took me in a whole different direction.

Grace Yoo: So your involvement in the strike really sort of led to your own career trajectory.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, also San Francisco State in general. I chose San Francisco State because there were so many what seemed like really revolutionary things happening. Student-led courses. Experimental college. Tutorial program. Really exciting stuff. That was also part of the ferment and that helped to give rise to TWLF and the strike and BSU success.

Grace Yoo: That's amazing. Are there other lasting impacts that the strike had on you and being at SF State?

Penny Nakatsu: Well, I think it changed my frame of mind realizing the importance of taking the long view. Looking beyond one's own personal perspective and I think that's continued to be something that's been a part of my way of thinking. And over the years, I've come to realize that not all of us are going to be doing big, splashy public things. But there's a lot that anyone can do, everyone can do. Even if you think it's not very important. Kindness - I really do believe that even small actions have their own ripple effect. And everyone can, no matter who you are, where you are, we can all do something to help other people and do what we can.

Grace Yoo: That's powerful. And I think the strike created these movements. When you look back, I don't know, you're 18 to 22. I feel like you were so mature and you were like a leader. I find it kind of amazing.

Penny Nakatsu: I was a little bit precocious in some ways because I had lots of questions from a pretty early age and it was just the way my mind worked, I guess.

Grace Yoo: And willing to be the leader for AAPA and having that courage.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, somebody had to do it. I mean, I wasn't doing it to put myself forward but somebody had to do it.

Grace Yoo: But that somebody had to do it, I'm wondering, has that always guided you through your life too? You might have been the first in a lot of situations, the first female, the first Asian American female, just like the first everywhere you went, right? That kind of - someone has to do this (mentality) - it is a kind of courage.

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, I suppose. I believe that it's important to stand up for the right thing at an early age and it didn't always sit that well because I was a kind of kid who asked a lot of questions and did question things. It didn't go over that well in a catholic school.

Yoko Tamada: I'm just thinking about what we asked Dan. We asked him about his reaction to the assassination of MLK.

Grace Yoo: Oh yeah, did we ask you that? I don't think we asked you that last time. What was going on with you at that moment in time?

1:50:42 Penny Nakatsu: Well, in a way, the assassination of Martin Luther King, although it stood out, there was so much that was happening during that period of time. JFK also was assassinated around that time. There was Vietnam and even though I knew who Martin Luther King was and how important he was, it did affect me in the sense that I thought that I realized that the reason why he was assassinated was because he was effective. He was an important leader. And it just made me want to realize that you can't let events like that stop you. But that is the risk that that comes with stepping out and it did affect me in terms of sort of really solidifying my sense that it's important to keep on going.

Grace Yoo: Understand that for what is right. We did ask her about solidarity and what that looked like. It's interesting cause we're getting diverse answers to what solidarity look like and what it is.

Penny Nakatsu: Interesting, really?

Grace Yoo: Yeah, Nesbit said it was listening. And Mason also too. So I don't know at the general committees it seems like...

Penny Nakatsu: Well, I think I was sort of saying that in a different kind of way. Being respectful, inviting other points of view.

Grace Yoo: Yeah, it's good to have that because I think sometimes, Mason said that often people would tell their own stories so that you could hear it.

Penny Nakatsu: Those meetings, a lot of those meetings are pretty long meetings.

Grace Yoo: Was there arguing too?

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah. A lot of arguing.

Grace Yoo: How did the arguments get resolved? Because sometimes, how do you get to solidarity if you argue all the time?

Penny Nakatsu: You just move to it until you can reach some kind of consensus. And sometimes you still disagree, but again, democratic centralism was what we operated by. You may continue to disagree, but in the final analysis decisions get made and you move forward.

Grace Yoo: And then try not to take it personally. Because that's the other thing, that's how you get to solidarity. Because some people could take it personally, and then there's no solidarity.

Penny Nakatsu: Yes, it's not about the individual.

Grace Yoo: Yeah, yeah. So that's a question we're asking because, it was the first multiracial multiethnic coalition I'm aware of in U.S. history.

Juice Canales: Well, actually I did have a question. My question is, did you have any younger family members or people who came after you and what was their understanding of what you did, do they know?

Penny Nakatsu: Well, I had a really small family. I had my sister. There were just two of us. I never talked to her about it, so I really don't know, but she was never politically active. One of my cousins became a teacher, which I think continues to do really important work. But none of my relatives, I'm talking primarily about my relatives on my father's side, because my relatives in Japan I don't even know who they were, but for the most part was (not) politically active.

Grace Yoo: So Dan talked about in addition to the strike, but parts of the strike also a big thing was sex, drugs and rock n roll. What's your take on that? And the partying, but there's organizing.

Penny Nakatsu: There's a lot of partying. I wasn't into the whole partying scene. But that was how you bonded too. You worked hard and you played hard, you played together and you walked the lines together, and the drugs was part of that too.

Grace Yoo: Ok, so that was the bonding?

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, it's a way to bond. Those were the times, right?

Grace Yoo: But you weren't involved in that?

Penny Nakatsu: I did experiment a little bit. I didn't really smoke a lot, but I did smoke some.

Grace Yoo: Weed or whatever.

Penny Nakatsu: Right. I actually also smoked tobacco. I was a chain smoker. But, yeah, I did smoke.

Grace Yoo: So that was a way of bonding them for people and maybe breaking down barriers that people might have had of misperceptions of each other.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, you know the phrase break bread together? Well, it's some of that too. You ate together, you smoke together, you dropped acid together. Whatever it is.

Grace Yoo: And that might have made the coalition stronger.

Juice Canales: As a secret weapon.

Grace Yoo: Because when you're arguing all the time, but maybe this other part was a way to ease.

Penny Nakatsu: Mellow out together, space out together, party together. There's a big party ethos, but it was important. I understood that. I was just not a party person.

Grace Yoo: Yeah. Well, you strike me as the intellectual of the group, so everyone's partying and you're still kind of helping lead the way.

Penny Nakatsu: Yeah, it's kind of heady.

Juice Canales: Seriously, come on, guys. Get it together.

Grace Yoo: Everyone else have the hangover.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, there's a role for everybody.

Grace Yoo: That was always a question I had because I think Dan was describing it all.

Yoko Tamada: He mentioned it so often in the interview last week, he was, yeah, I know who smoked weed, but I can't tell you because they don't want others to know.

Grace Yoo: How did everything get done if everyone's high all the time.

Yoko Tamada: They got their best ideas.

Grace Yoo: Yeah, they got their best ideas, or at least it broke down the barriers with one another and building the bonding.

Penny Nakatsu: It relieves some of the stress, right.

Yoko Tamada: Because so much was going on during the time.

Grace Yoo: Also, during this time period, were you worried about men you knew, young men in Vietnam? What was your take on the Vietnam War? Because people have said to, like Paul has

said the draft and all that also influenced him and his choices to resist the draft and I don't know what your observations were at the time around that.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, I knew what a significant thing the draft system was and also how the disproportionate impact of the draft on Third World Communities, Black and Brown communities in particular.

Grace Yoo: It definitely felt like for certain several of the, like Paul, that was really key and kind of led him into the strike, I guess.

Penny Nakatsu: Well, in a lot of ways, being able to go to college also had life and death impacts because one of the ways in which you could defer the draft was a student exemption. But you have to be in good standing at a vocational school or a college in order to qualify for that exemption. So not having the opportunity to even go to JC (junior college), much less a college had potentially life and death implications for young men who were subject to the draft.

Addendum to Penny Nakatsu Interview Transcript:

Professor James (Jim) Hirabayashi, a Harvard educated anthropologist was a tenured member of the SF State Anthropology Department in 1968, the year Jim became the faculty advisor to the Asian American Political Alliance. (Jim later became the first Dean of the School of Ethnic Studies, inaugurated in 1968 as a result of the Strike.) Jim's brother Gordon Hirabayashi, challenged his conviction for violating the curfew imposed on persons of Japanese ethnicity (Nikkei) before removal to the concentration camps established pursuant to President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066. In 1942, the United States Supreme Court upheld Jim's conviction, determining the curfew to be a valid exercise of governmental power. The Hirabayashi case was one of three lawsuits challenging the curfew, removal, conviction and incarceration of Nikkei in the wake of President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066, which the United States Supreme Court decided in favor of the government. These World War II decisions were later overturned in 1987 in response to coram nobis petitions filed by Nikkei attorneys as a part of the Redress movement.